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ABSTRACT

The verbal discourse of Yakima children was examined. Conversations with nine Yakima and nine non-Indian children, ranging in age from 3 years 10 months to 5 years 11 months, were tape recorded. Four of the non-Indian children lived on the Yakima Reservation and attended the same preschool program as the Yakima children; the other five lived in the Palo Alto, California, area. Recording time varied from about 20 to 40 minutes, depending on such activities as recess and lunch time. Conversation topics were selected by the children using colored pictures. Discourse features examined were answering and asking questions, interruptions, pauses, and organization of material. It was found that Yakima children: were more eager to engage in conversation but failed to respond to more questions than the non-Indian children, guessed at answers less often, paused longer before answering, never interrupted, asked more questions, never corrected the investigator, and used a narrative register where the non-Indian children used a discourse register. The differences found were attributed primarily to cultural differences. (NQ)

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Discourse, Culture and Instruction[1]

Thelma E. Weeks

It would not be surprising to find cultural differences between the language usage of an English-speaking American Indian child who was reared on an Indian Reservation and non-Indian child, but what would the differences be?

Ever since I started working with the Indians on the Yakima Indian Reservation (located in central Washington) in 1968, I have been hearing reports from school principals and teachers about the Yakima children's 'language problems'. While the 'language problems' were never well specified, one complaint was that the children couldn't answer questions--couldn't talk in class. I have commented on some aspects of the problem elsewhere (Weeks 1975 and Weeks & Weeks 1975) but in this study, I wish to examine certain aspects of the skills of the Yakima children in verbal discourse.

Home Language

The native language of Yakima Indian children is English. While Sahaptin, the language of the Yakima Indians, was the mother tongue for the grandparents and for most of the parents, only a few older Yakimas are monolingual Sahaptin speakers. The middle generation cannot be easily characterized regarding bilingualism. Some speak Sahaptin fluently in appropriate situations, while others appear to have only

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minimal passive competence and little, if any, active competence in Sahaptin. When I have asked for translations for words and phrases, some members of this generation have told me that they were punished so severely in Bureau of Indian Affairs schools for using their native language that they are unable to recall anything but the most commonly used expressions in Sahaptin. They seem to have unanimously resolved to speak nothing but English to their children in order to help the children avoid such problems in school. However, many traces of the native Indian language as well as the native culture can be seen in the language behavior of the children.

Description of Research

Subjects

I tape recorded conversations with 12 Yakima children,[2] however, only 9 of them were suitable for the analysis discussed here. I also recorded conversations with 4 non-Indian children who lived on the Yakima Reservation and attended the same pre-school program that the Yakima children attended. Another 5 non-Indian children whose conversations were recorded lived in the Palo Alto, California, area. The children ranged in age from 3 years, 10 months to 5 years, 11 months.

Recording Sessions

The preschool program where tape recording was done was conducted by Yakima Indian adults, both men and women, and sponsored by the Yakima Indian Tribal Council. A private room (though not quiet) was provided for the research.

Recording time for the conversations with each child varied from about 20 minutes to 40 minutes, depending on other activities, such as recess and lunch time. No recording session was ever cut short because the child tired of it. The Yakima children in particular loved talking and several requested second and third sessions when their original session could not be extended.

Conversation Topics

As a means of offering topics for conversations, I had a stack of colored pictures from which the children chose some to talk about.

There are several ways in which discourse that is stimulated by pictures chosen by a child may differ from most conversations between an adult and a child:

1. The child largely controls the topics to be discussed. When the children finished talking about the picture directly, they often went on to discuss personal experiences suggested by the picture. In adult-child conversations, it is usually the case that the adult asks questions that he thinks are suitable and controls the conversation topics to a large degree even though he may never choose a topic the child is interested in.

2. The child may readily change the topic by selecting another picture. In other child-adult conversations, the child is more likely than the adult to have difficulty in introducing new topics.

3. Because the picture remains where both the child and the adult can see it, the child uses more demonstrative and personal pronouns than he would otherwise. When considering 'new' and 'given'

information in a conversation, it is only the 'given' information--that which has been previously mentioned in the conversation--that can properly be represented anaphorically. In this case, information represented in the picture had to be considered as 'given,' resulting in what sounded (when analyzing the transcription of audio-only tapes) like a number of inappropriate uses of pronouns. An analysis of children's discourse often examines the appropriate use of anaphoric pronouns, but, for the reason just given, we didn't consider it appropriate here.

Discourse Features Examined

1. Answering Questions

Since teachers of the Yakima children had mentioned specifically that they did not seem to be able to answer questions, I looked most intently at this aspect of the conversations with the Yakima children.

Mishler (1975a) is one of many who has noted that questions demand answers. He maintains that questions not only need answers, they need confirmation: "In more 'open' natural conversation the question-answer exchange seems totally inapplicable as a basic unit of conversation; a question not only 'demands' a response, but the response demands a further 'response' from the questioner. In brief, an answer to a question does not terminate an exchange in any meaningful social sense. It is terminated by a 'sign' on the part of the questioner that his questions has received a response, adequate or inadequate, appropriate or inappropriate." Mishler suggests that Question-Response-Confirmation constitutes the usual pattern in conversation.

Philips (1976) suggests, however, that this may be culture-specific. She observes that "for Anglos, answers to questions are close to obligatory, even if they take the form of 'I can't answer that right now,' or a brief shake of the head," but that for the Warm Springs Indians, answers to questions are not obligatory. Questions may be answered at a later time, or possibly not at all, but acknowledgment of the question need not be made, since it may be assumed that the listener was indeed listening. "In Indian interaction," says Philips, "the speaker may be certain of attention from hearers."

It appears that the 'confirmation' requirement, referred to by Mishler, serves the purpose of assuring the listener that he has heard the response to his question. Would there be any reason for the Sahaptin-speaking Indians to observe this practice? The Sahaptin-speaking Indians (or those descended from the Sahaptin-speakers) at Warm Springs are closely related to the Yakima Indians, and the cultural patterns are very similar. What might conversational patterns be, then, among Yakima Indians, and in particular, with Yakima children?

At the Child Language Research Forum at Stanford University in April, 1976, Philip Dale remarked that children are very reluctant to answer with "I don't know." That rang true to the child language researchers present. I scanned the transcriptions of my conversations with the 5 children whose language development I follow regularly and found a few occasions when the two girls responded with "I don't know," but could not find even one instance of the three boys saying it. The two boys who were first-born in their respective families would go to

almost any extreme to avoid it, often using devious methods. The third boy usually avoided the dreaded phrase by stating simply "Let's not talk about that."

In the matter of guessing, we have noted that school teachers are much inclined to encourage guessing in cases where a child is uncertain of an answer. We have also noted in conversation with Yakima adults that they are not at all inclined to guess. They feel they would lose face if they gave an answer that turned out to be wrong. A student of mine who spent 5 years in Indonesia said she and her husband were given wrong directions innumerably because the native they asked didn't want to lose face by saying they didn't know where something was. They invariably guessed. This attitude varies widely with culture.

We were interested, then, in whether or not the Yakima children would fail to respond to questions, respond with "I don't know," guess, or change the subject.

2. Asking Questions

While it is usually thought that asking questions is an indication of brightness in a child, conversations between an adult and a child are usually initiated and controlled by questions from the adult. Mishler (1975b) suggests that even when children ask an adult a question, the adult regains control of the conversation by responding with a question.

We considered it a matter of interest to see whether or not the Yakima children would play an active or passive role in conversation

regarding question-asking. Also, if they asked questions, would they confirm the responses that were given?

3. Interruptions

Philips (1976) has pointed out regarding the Warm Springs Indians that "The pauses between two different speakers' turns at talk are frequently longer than is the case in Anglo interactions. There is tolerance for silences--silences that Anglos often rush into and fill. Indian speakers rarely, if ever, begin to speak at the same time and rarely interrupt one another." The situation with the Warm Springs Indians, according to Philips, and with the Yakimas, by my experience, is that they listen and appear to wait until the speaker is through talking before formulating their own response, if any. This contrasts with the mainstream culture in the United States where the 'listener' often appears to be formulating his own response long before the speaker is through, and often responds instantaneously when the speaker finishes, or before.

What would the pattern of interruptions and pauses be with the Yakima children?

4. Organization of Material

Chafe (1976) has suggested that there are cultural differences in the way a person organizes the content of his material when reporting an event in conversation. He suggests that in our culture we are most apt to start out by summarizing the event and then expanding on it, e.g., "I'm going to tell you about my trip to Denver," and then proceeding to report events chronologically. The Japanese, by comparison,

he points out, generally seem to build up through a series of details to a final conclusion, so that the summary is at the end rather than at the beginning. He noted also that there are ways other than chronological ordering to organize material.

The fourth general question regarding conversational skill in the Yakima children is how they would organize material when reporting events.

Results and Discussion

The number of children involved in this study was small and the individual differences were great; we have therefore resisted taking totals and averages of discourse features. Individual differences in conversational style appear to be normal, in child or adult populations. Some children, both Indian and non-Indian, were far more talkative than others. The number of turns in conversation ranged from 21 to 80. Some talked briefly during each turn, averaging about 2 utterances per turn, while others were more talkative during each turn. The girl who took only 21 turns spoke 14 utterances during one turn, and seldom limited herself to only one utterance. Some children chose 7 or 8 pictures and talked briefly about a number of topics, while others chose only 2 or 3 pictures and expanded at length on each one.

One overall pattern that emerged, however, was that the Yakima children were much more inclined to use the pictures as a point of departure and discuss personal experiences. Their conversations were more 'conversation-like' than those with the non-Indian children, who tended to itemize what they saw in the picture or describe the action, and then choose another picture. One white girl who lived on the

Yakima Reservation asked, after I suggested she pick out some pictures she would like to talk about, "What do I have to say?" This was a typical attitude on the part of the non-Indian children. They assumed there was something specific that was expected of them and they must determine the rules and follow them. They seemed to be assuming different roles--the non-Indians assuming a student role and the Yakimas the role of a friend.

Answering Questions

The Yakima children appeared to be more eager to converse, to have a turn talking into the microphone, than the non-Indian children, and exhibited more pleasure in the process. They did, however, leave more questions unanswered.

One problem may have been my own very brief pauses in waiting for an answer. With adult Yakimas, I deliberately waited for a longer period for an answer, but, not wanting to embarrass the child in case he couldn't answer, I filled what probably should have been waiting time with another question or remark. However, when I judged the child was pondering the question, I waited as long as 16 seconds, in one instance, but more often not more than 10 seconds, before continuing the conversation. It was not unusual for me to ask 4 or 5 questions before getting a response, but my usual pause was from 3 to 4 seconds. For example, one Yakima girl told me she had gone to a war dance, and had been telling me that they had pop and things to eat there. She continued with "and..." after 10 seconds I asked "And what does the war dance look like?" No answer. "I've never seen anybody do a war dance.

What do they do?" After 6 seconds she said, "Uh..." and at 14 seconds I asked, "Do they wear pretty costumes?" She answered obliquely, "I have them in purple and some stuff that's on the ground."

There were no such series of unanswered questions with the non-Indian children, but there were unanswered questions that resulted in topic-changing; a child would appear not to hear my question while he chose a new picture. This happened several times with the non-Indian children but not at all with the Yakimas.

Yakima children often answered questions obliquely: one girl chose a picture of a child's room full of toys with a girl sitting on her bed. I asked what the little girl might do in that room, and she answered, "Plays in there. She might play with her doll." I confirmed with "Uh hum," and asked, "Is that something you like to do?" After a 4 sec. pause she answered, "I have a little...a big doll." I went on to ask "Do you like to play house with your doll?" She didn't answer at all. Perhaps the term play house didn't mean anything to her. I asked, "What do you and your dolly do?" and she itemized activities, "Play with toy refrigerator...drink pop...I pretend we have curtains, and they have flowers on 'em."

Oblique answers, or responses that acknowledged that they had heard my question but were not answering it directly were not unusual with the Yakima children.

There were also a number of instances in which the Yakima children continued the topic of conversation, but appeared to be continuing their own train of thoughts rather than answering my questions. For

example, a Yakima girl was looking at a picture of two boys climbing a large tree. A lake appeared in the background. It wasn't very close to the tree, but that was not apparent to several children. When she picked out the picture, I asked, "What are the children doing there?" She answered, "Climbin' a tree." I answered, "Right. You think that's fun--climbing a tree?" She said, "Bet we will fall off." I asked why she thought that, and she said,"'Cause there's water. And they might fall in there." The picture had apparently evoked a strong feeling in her, and she was too absorbed in it to answer me directly. Or perhaps her answer was an indirect one--no, I don't think it's fun because it's too dangerous.

Another instance: a Yakima girl was telling about going sledding on a sled so big that 12 people could get on it. I said, "That's a big sled! What did you call it--a toboggan or a bobsled?" She answered, "I can't remember when we done that--when 12 got on that big one." She continued reminiscing about the experience. It could be that she didn't know the answer and sidestepped it, or she may have just been continuing her previous train of thought, just as other Yakima children had done several times. However, she paid attention to most of my remarks, and immediately after her recounting her experience, I said that I used to do that when I was a little girl, and she asked, "Did it tickle your tummy?"

I asked all of the children rhetorical questions of the variety, "There are lots of people who like to go to the rodeo, aren't there?" The non-Indian children generally acknowledged such questions minimally

with "Um hum," "Yeah" or by nodding or shaking their heads. There was just one instance of a Yakima child acknowledging such a question. We were looking at a picture that included several varieties of flowers. This girl had guessed that one lavender flower was a lilac. I asked what the yellow flowers might be, and she answered, "Might be xxx. (The x's represent unintelligible speech.) They must be eatin' it." I remarked, "They look like they might be daisies. Anyway, they're pretty, aren't they?" And she answered, "They're pretty." The answer was appropriate, but such repetition is not usual.

I found two examples of what might have been guessing on the part of Yakima children after I prodded. On the other hand, my "prodding" may have served as clarification of the question, making it possible for the children to answer without guessing. One girl chose a picture of two children throwing a ball. The sun was at the horizon in the background. I asked "What time of day do you suppose that is?" No answer. "Do you think that's in the afternoon or the morning?" She ventured, "Morning." I confirmed, "Morning. It looks like the sun's just come up, doesn't it? (It could as easily have been evening, of course.) There's the sun over there, shining through the trees. Where do you suppose they are?" No answer. "Does that look like a playground, or where do you think they are?" "Park," she guessed.

Several times guessing took the form of asking whether or not the reply was correct by the use of rising intonation. One girl chose a picture of a typical middle-class white girl's bedroom full of toys, etc. She began to itemize things in the room, always naming the item

with a question intonation, and pausing, looking toward me and waiting for agreement before continuing, e.g., "Basket?" "Right. That's a basket." "Playbooks?" "Uh huh." "Books?" "Right." "Doll?" "Right." Etc.

There is a qualitative difference, of course, in guessing with a rising intonation that clearly says, "I'm guessing. Am I right?" and guessing that prosodically suggests full knowledge, as the non-Indian children often did, sometimes resulting in incorrect answers.

An instance where the child might have been able to guess the correct answer but wouldn't try follows: a Yakima boy had chosen a picture of sail boats at a marina. I asked, "Do you know what it is he's climbing?" No answer. "What are those things called?" I asked, pointing to the mast. He said, "Mmmmm. What are they?" His lengthened m may represent a guess at the initial sound, or may not.

While this boy didn't reply "I don't know," his response was the equivalent. Other Yakima children replied, "I forgot" "I don't know," or simply "What?" on an average of about once during the conversation. I found only one instance of a non-Indian child replying, "No, what?" although I answered"I don't know" to their questions quite often.

Some replies were hard to categorize. One Yakima boy [3] chose a picture of some people with camping gear. I asked, "What do you think they might be doing with all this stuff?" "Doin' sumpin'," he replied. It was another way of avoiding "I don't know". This same boy chose another picture and I asked "What's that a picture of?" He answered, "I know what it is." "You do?" I asked. I assumed,

however, that while he was familiar with the object, he couldn't recall the name of it, and after only a 2 second pause, I said "That's a railroad engine."

There were many exchanges such as: "What do you think these two girls are doing?" No answer. Was it the case that the child didn't comprehend the question, or that they needed more time than I gave them to ponder the question, or was it that they didn't know the answer for sure and wouldn't guess? It is likely that the Yakima children had had less experience dealing with pictures than the non-Indian children, and some responses indicate this. For example, in the example just mentioned of the picture of two children playing ball, I asked "Where do you suppose they are?" and the child answered, pointing, "Right there and right there." Another child, cited above, when asked the same question about the same picture, had failed to answer until I asked if it looked like a playground, at which she replied, "Park." Pictures, as opposed to reality, may be somewhat confusing in a culture where books, magazines, and pictures in general (other than TV) are not very common.

Changing the subject when they were unable to answer a question was by far the most usual ruse for the non-Indian children to use. The pile of pictures in front of them made it a simple procedure. I found only one example of a Yakima child deliberately changing the subject, and this seemed to be because he was embarrassed (at 3;10 he was the youngest child I interviewed). He had explained to me that someone was "one of our brother longs." He ended the sentence

with a rising intonation, as though he were either not sure of what he was saying or he thought I wouldn't know. I asked, "He's what?" "He's one of our brother longs." (rising intonation again). "One of your brother longs?" I repeated. He agreed, then started making some sounds, "Um hum. WRRRRR...WRRRRR. Can't see me!" He hid behind the picture. "Peek a boo!" he said as he looked around it. The man he was referring to may have been a brother-in-law in the family. I allowed the subject to drop.

In summary, the only examples here of non-Indian children not answering questions, with guesses or otherwise, were case where they ignored the question while they chose another picture (changed the subject). The Yakima children failed to respond to many questions. They did occasionally guess, principally guessing that was in the nature of questioning (ending with a rising intonation). Because of the small sample of children, no conclusions can be drawn about the admission of lack of knowledge, but the Yakima children were more inclined to reply with "I don't know" or equivalents than the non-Indian children.

Asking Questions

Bright children are supposed to ask a lot of questions, but it also appears that question-asking is role-related. Children, particularly in traditional classrooms, often assume it is the teacher's role to ask questions and their role to answer them. I found that non-Indian children were much more inclined to call me teacher, and to answer every question I asked, even if they answered it incorrectly,

and not to ask me any, than the Yakima children. Some of the Yakima children, on the other hand, took virtual control of the conversation by asking me questions. Out of 51 turns in conversation, the girl who asked me if sledding tickled my tummy, also asked me 22 other questions. One didn't ask me any questions, but most of the Yakimas were in between, usually asking questions for further information about some of the pictures. They could not be characterized as passive participants in the conversation.

None of the questions asked by non-Indian children were of a personal nature. They asked questions about the pictures: "Where's the haystack at?" "What kind are these truck?" "How do they make it go?" "Are those cowboys?" etc. The Yakima children asked many questions of this sort, but they also asked questions of a more personal nature: "Now whata you gonna do?" "What's your name?" "Do you know Ted?" "How did you know my name?" "You know my middle name?" "How do you spell it?" "Didn't you fall?" "Could I hold that?" (the microphone), and "Did it tickle your tummy?"

The Yakima children also asked questions requesting clarification: I asked, "What kind of fish do you catch when you go fishing?" and the child asked, "Uh...you mean what color?" I answered, "Oh, what color, or what kind." No response. "What do you call the fish when you catch fish?" No response. "Have you ever been fishing?" She answered, "We got...Once my daddy...he caught a fish...he caught a whale, too." My response to her request for clarification would have been more

help if I had suggested two or three varieties of fish, such as trout or salmon, which I assume she would have been familiar with.

With regard to asking for clarification or correcting false impressions, I should mention that the non-Indian children regularly corrected me if I misunderstood them. They would repeat a word 2 or 3 times if necessary to make me understand. Yakima children did not. There was one Yakima girl who was very difficult to understand. She had been talking about going camping in the mountains with her grandmother. I asked what they liked to cook when they went to the mountains. She answered "Anything" /Initiŋ/ with very high front, tense vowels, and I thought she said "Indian things." So I asked, "What would Indian things be?" She answered, "Well, Grandma cooks mush. Or initing." This time I guessed, "Indian tea?" and she agreed, "She makes tea." She made no move to correct me. I had no inkling of this while I was talking to her, but when I transcribed the tape, I understood instantly what she was talking about, and was amazed at her patience with me. There were several such examples of the Yakima children failing to correct my misconceptions.

It was not always easy to determine the purpose of some questions: A Yakima boy, looking at a picture of some mountains, said, "I think it's a bear! Is there a bear?" "Well, I don't see one, do you?" "Yeah," he answered. "Well," I conceded, "there might be. Because there are big trees, and it's out in the mountains. There might be bears." "There're some bears up there. Up there. Go get 'em! Jump! I probably fall down and jump off." He was fantasizing as he had done other times.

It is interesting that the four non-Indian children I talked to at Yakima were like the non-Indian children recorded in California, not like the Yakima Indian children with whom they played 5 days a week. The Yakima children answered fewer questions and asked more.

In examing the transcriptions for confirmations, I found that Mishler (1975a) was correct insofar as my conversation was concerned. There was no instance in which I did not offer confirmation of some kind when a child answered my question. However, I found only one case in which a Yakima child confirmed my response to a question. We had been discussing people who were having a picnic on a beach. I said, "They spread out a blanket." She answered, "It look like it. They like to be on beaches? He like to fish, doesn't he?" "Yes, I expect so." She replied, "He likes fish." It may not have been intended as a confirmation, but may have been a continuation of her thoughts about what was happening on the beach, for her next statement was "Because he's a little bit big."

Indications were that the Yakima children were interpreting the situation as a friendly visit, not as a teacher-student interview, and therefore, might fit into a scheme where confirmation would be required. However, the children did not offer confirmation after a response to their questions. On the other hand, indications were that the non-Indian children were interpreting the situation as a teacher-student interview, in which case a confirmation is not required. They did not offer them.

Interruptions

As would be predicted from Philips (1976), the Yakima children did not interrupt me in conversation even once. I have not analyzed taped conversations between Yakima children (child-child as opposed to child-adult), but I would not expect it to be different. Of the 5 children whose language development I regularly follow, all interrupt me from time to time, and one does it quite often. The non-Indian children at Yakima also broke in while I was speaking. For example, a boy had chosen a picture of a rodeo and I asked, "You ever see..." and he interrupted, "Yeah, I was watching them, too..." Interruptions usually accompanied excited speech, but not always. A non-Indian girl at Yakima was telling about camping, and I asked, "Did you stay for a while..." when she interrupted, "Yeah, we went camping, and we went camping at Junior's lake." Another child and I were talking about a picture of a girl with a cat and I said, "It's a very young kitty, and I guess that little girl..." and she broke in, "Yeah, our kitty is going to be full grown." I asked, "Is it?" and she corrected, "Yeah, he's going to be."

The Yakima children practiced the opposite of interruptions--long pauses.

Organization of Material

In this discussion of the reporting of events in the course of conversation, events will refer either to happenings in the lives of the children themselves or events as depicted in the pictures or imagined by the children.

I have commented elsewhere (Weeks 1975) on the preference in our culture for a brief, summarizing report of events that does not use many, if any, direct quotations. The style "Then I says to her and she says to me," is equated with lower-socio economic class. The approved method involves summarizing.

While it could not be said that the non-Indian children briefly summarized the events depicted in a picture, there did emerge definite differences in the style of the two groups. The non-Indian children usually described what they saw as one might read a grocery list. While the Yakima children usually picked up a picture and waited for me to say something ("What's happening here?" was my usual question), the non-Indian children often picked up a picture and started talking instantaneously: "This one. Lots of horses are down on the ground and some people. Tap at the window and horses be mean to it. Putting their head down under. Here." Or choosing a second or third picture: "This one. They picking flowers. Pick some more flower." In each case I would follow with comments or questions or both, and they would always respond, but they seemed to be describing the picture as fully as they could with their first turn.

The non-Indian children used a discourse register[4] whether they were describing an event depicted in the picture or something that had happened to themselves. E.g., one girl chose a picture of a child with a cat. "I like that picture. I had a baby cat like that." "You did?" I asked. "But mommy...it was a baby cat and it was lost and I uh didn't know who it belonged to and I was going to keep it but mommy started the next morning to keep it but Daddy took it

and threw it down and it went away because he never liked my daddy." Not one non-Indian child included verbatim conversation in the events they reported.

On the other hand, the Yakima children made frequent use of a narrative (or storytelling) register. The presented material as one might tell a story, using direct quotations and a wider range in intonation patterns. A Yakima girl and I were discussing boats: I asked, "You ever been on a boat?" She answered, "We have a boat at home. Tommy...we were out in the wood and there was lots of water there and we used to clean fish." "Oh. You like fish?" "Grandma said, 'Tommy's going to get that boat and take us a ride on there. Waaay out there." "Where?" "Waaay out there." "Where's that?" "Across Hood River." Way was lengthened considerably.

The Yakima children often commented about the action in the pictures: "Look at kids climbin' up that tree. They not 'posed to hunt or fall down in the water, huh?" And later, "Oh, what's that? Oh, I see a boat!" I asked a boy what he wanted to tell me about a train, and he imitated the sound a train makes. Later he imitated the sounds of a ship horn when we were discussing ships.

In another instance a Yakima girl was looking at a picture of visitors in a zoo taking pictures of seals in a pond. She built up a story where there was none to start with: "And they're takin' pictures. There're people lookin' at them takin' pictures. They touched them. And there might be water in them. And they might all fall in. And then the water might be deep, and their father might jump in."

It should be noted here that Jacobs (1931:271) comments regarding Sahaptin, "In quotes and direct discourse, remarks are often treated as a sentence-object of the verb. Not only are remarks turned into object clauses, but Sahaptin may throw into object clauses any statements of sensory or ideational activity. Thus, for 'He saw them coming,' Sahaptin says, 'He saw 'now they are coming.'" Also, "He didn't know where he was going" would become "He did not know 'where am I going?'" A language tradition of this kind increases the probability that English speakers with a Sahaptin background would use direct quotations in discourse. It was found in an earlier study (Weeks & Weeks 1975) that Yakima children used significantly more direct quotations than non-Indian children in a storytelling task and somewhat more in conversation.

The use of abundant direct quotations is considered appropriate in our culture for storytelling purposes, and we find individuals who enjoy relating experiences in their best narrative register, varying pitch, volume, speed, using other dialects when appropriate, and using direct quotations. Probably every culture has such a register available, but the question is how many individuals use it, and for what occasions.

What appeared to be happening here was that the Yakima children were interpreting the conversation with an adult as an appropriate situation in which to use such a narrative register, whereas the non-Indian children did not. The same had been true in the storyretelling task (Weeks & Weeks 1975): even though some of the non-Indian

children were known to have a well developed narrative register, they did not use it in the story retelling task, whereas all of the Yakima children made some style changes in retelling the story.

All of the children organized events, by and large, in a chronological order, where time was involved. None of the children 'summarized' material in the way an adult might, though there were differences in the extent to which details were either omitted or included. If one interprets a situation as calling for a narrative style, one will include details and devise ways of making the reported event entertaining that one would not use in a reporting style.

In this instance, the Yakima children interpreted the situation more as I had hoped than the non-Indian children did. Other researchers have reported that children from nursery-school age on call any new adult in their room 'teacher,' and this was my experience both in Palo Alto and at Yakima, where the white children were concerned. None of the 12 Yakima children called me teacher. They simply did not address me. When they wanted my attention, they took my hand, caught my eye, or got my attention in some way other than calling me 'teacher.' I believe that the interpretation of the situation as a teacher-student relationship on the part of the non-Indian children caused some of the differences between their performance and that of the Yakima children.

One important difference between the two groups of children, then, involves the matter of what is chosen to report. The Yakima children more often reported extraneous matter--the child's speculations

about what might happen as opposed to restricting themselves to what is actually seen in the picture, as the non-Indian children did. Second, the Yakima children reported in a more colorful manner, switching from a discourse register (which they used part of the time) to a narrative register for reporting plot-like activities. Where the picture did not indicate a plot, they often invented one (the children will fall into the seal pond as a result of their trying to touch the seals, and their father will jump in to save them; there are bears in the mountains, and if I try to climb a tree to get one, I will fall out of the tree, etc.). Their narrative register as well as their discourse register included the use of some direct quotations, whereas the non-Indian children used none.

Summary

There were differences between two small groups of children, Yakima and non-Indian, in language usage that should be categorized as cultural. Differences exhibited in conversation between myself and the children included the following aspects of language usage:

1. The Yakima children were more eager to converse, more eager to extend conversational time, and displayed more pleasure in the process of conversation than the non-Indian children.

2. The Yakima children left more questions directed to them unanswered than the non-Indian children.

3. The Yakima children guessed at answers less often than the non-Indian children, and admitted they didn't know answers more often.

4. Yakima children paused before answering, and never interrupted, while the non-Indian children paused more briefly or interrupted before I finished speaking.

5. Yakima children asked more questions, some of them of a personal nature, than the non-Indian children, who asked no personal questions.

6. The Yakima children failed to correct my misconceptions or misunderstanding of them in every case, while the non-Indian children did not hesitate to correct me.

7. Yakima children tended to reorganize material into a narrative form, selecting different kinds of events to report than the non-Indian children, who reported events more simply in a discourse register.

I expected to find that the Yakima children would fail to confirm responses to their own questions, inasmuch as Yakimas feel confident of the listener's attention (Philips 1976). I also expected (in view of the Mishler 1975a study) that the non-Indian children would offer such confirmations. I found only rare examples in either group, but the lack of it may derive from causes. Evidence suggests that differences in assumed roles on the part of the Yakima and non-Indian children could be a determining factor, but more research is needed.

It remains to be determined why some of these differences, particularly in answering questions, exist. Are there important differences in experience that accentuate the inherent cultural differences? E.g., do the Yakima children have noticeably less

opportunity to converse with adults and to be confronted by questions than the non-Indian children? It is an area that needs to be investigated more thoroughly. Nevertheless, the Yakima children were active participants in the conversations by any standards, contributing their full share to the activity. The differences found between their performance and that of the non-Indian children need to be recognized by teachers and school officials for what they are--cultural differences--not language deficiencies.

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Footnotes

[1]This is a revised version of a symposium paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Convention in San Francisco, April 21, 1976.

[2]The Yakima children attending this program may be thought of as coming from less traditional homes in that their mothers work; in the more traditional homes, mothers do not work outside the home. Children from more traditional homes with whom I have talked offer an even greater contrast in language usage to the non-Indian children than those recorded here.

[3]This boy's mother was a Yakima and his father a Native American, but not Yakima.

[4]Register is defined as a variety of language differing at any or all levels of form from other varieties of the same language, 'distinguished according to use'. (Halliday, McIntosh & Strevens)

Discourse, Culture and Instruction

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Several aspects of the conversational skills of 9 Yakima Indian children, as compared to 9 non-Indian children, aged 3 years 10 months to 5 years 11 months, are examined. It was found that Yakima children: (a) were more eager to engage in conversation, but failed to respond to more questions than the non-Indian children, (b) guessed at answers less often, (c) paused longer before answering, (d) never interrupted, (e) asked more questions, (f) never corrected the investigator, and (g) used a narrative register where non-Indian children used a discourse register. The differences found are attributed primarily to cultural differences. (Yakima Indians, sociolinguistics, registers, child language, conversational analysis)